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Washington, DC 20420
(202) 461-7600
www.va.gov

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VA Hosts Annual Brain Trust Event in Boston; Announces New Strategic Partnerships to Advance Solutions for TBI and PTSD

BOSTON — Designed to promote forward-thinking dialogue and innovative collaboration among private industry as well as national professional sports organizations around the issue of brain health, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is hosting its second annual Brain Trust: Pathways to InnoVAtion summit, which kicked off today at Harvard University.

With more than 350 invited attendees, the event gathered federal government, innovators, scientists, athletes, clinicians, caregivers and Veterans to advance discussions and improve the prevention, diagnosis, treatment and recovery for those who suffer from head trauma.

Traumatic brain injury (TBI) is often regarded as one of the signature injuries among Veterans of combat in Iraq and Afghanistan. According to the [Chronic Effects of Neurotrauma Consortium](#), of the more than 2.5 million service members who deployed to Iraq since 2003, almost 20 percent have had at least one TBI. However, issues related to brain health and head trauma transcend the Veteran and military community, impacting all Americans, particularly athletes participating in youth and major league sports.

“Brain Trust has inspired a new approach to collaborative partnerships across VA,” said VA Secretary [Dr. David J. Shulkin](#), who welcomed participants to the event. “While VA is uniquely positioned to contribute to the care of Veterans with traumatic brain injury, we’re able to accomplish so much more when we work strategically with our private and public sector partners. We look forward to working with our partners to improve care for Veterans — as well as all Americans — affected by brain-related injuries.”

VA officials announced the following key partnerships during Brain Trust:

Amazon: Amazon is teaming up with VA to extend the use of digital devices to help improve the lives of Veterans with disabilities. Through this collaboration, Amazon will donate 100 Amazon Echo devices with Alexa Voice Service units to VA’s Assistive Technology Labs. Amazon staff will also collaborate with VA experts to ensure Echo devices are programmed specifically to meet the needs of Veterans. Beyond the Echo donation, Amazon will also collaborate with VA staff to expand the accessibility of Kindle reading programs to Veterans and families staying at [VA Fisher Houses](#).

Cohen Veterans Bioscience (CVB): VA is partnering with CVB to address the challenge of advancing diagnostics for PTSD and TBI by joining the **Research Alliance for PTSD/TBI Innovation and Discovery Diagnosis (RAPID-Dx)**. This public-private partnership alliance led by CVB will enable different institutions to coordinate efforts and integrate data across dozens of labs to facilitate breakthroughs. The goal is to fast-track discovery and development of biomarkers and diagnostics to advance precision medicine for trauma-related disorders.

National Institutes of Health (NIH): NIH and VA will co-host a State of the Science Workshop dedicated to Chronic Traumatic Encephalopathy (CTE) and other neurodegenerative diseases in 2018. Both departments will convene a committee to review the growing body of research and literature related to repetitive head trauma. The workshop will culminate in a written “State of the Science” statement to guide future research on the issue of head trauma.

Additionally, Dr. Chris Nowinski, co-founder of the Concussion Legacy Foundation (CLF), announced that professional athletes, former NY Giants’ player Leonard Marshall and Seattle Seahawks’ Player (current ESPN announcer) Matt Hasselbeck pledged to donate their brains to the VA-Boston University-CLF Brain Bank for the purposes of advancing brain health. Directed by Dr. Ann McKee, chief of neuropathology at VA’s Boston Healthcare System, the VA-BU-CLF Brain Bank is now the largest sports mTBI and chronic traumatic encephalopathy (CTE) repository in the world, with more than 325 brains donated and over a thousand more pledged.

VA’s partners for the annual Brain Trust event include: Amazon, Booz Allen Hamilton, Cohen Veterans Bioscience, Comcast, Concussion Legacy Foundation, GE, IBM, Infinite Hero Foundation, Johnson & Johnson, Optum Health, Outward Bound, PenFed Foundation, Philips and the Warrior Care Network.

Brain Trust is a public-private partnership event coordinated by VA’s Center for Strategic Partnerships. To learn more about Brain Trust: Pathways to InnoVAtion, visit www.vabraintrust.com.

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